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# Senators shocked as mail tap process is admitted by CIA

From JONATHAN STEELE, Washington, September 24

The CIA secretly opened and read the mail of scores of leading citizens, including that of Richard Nixon shortly before he became President, it was revealed today.

In a new round of publicly televised hearings, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence this morning laid bare the heart and soul of the CIA's activity since its foundation. Both with and without presidential approval, it had regularly indulged in a wide variety of illegal surveillance of Americans.

The three-hour hearings raised many questions, not least of which was the degree of White House connivance with or control over the massive spy machine.

At the end, Senator Gary Hart of Colorado, backed by the chairman, Senator Frank Church of Idaho, publicly suggested for the first time that the committee may decide to demand former President Nixon's appearance in the witness seat.

Earlier, Senator Church had started the morning's hearing with the news that the CIA had opened letters directed to the Ford Foundation, Harvard University, and the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as to the late Martin Luther King, Hubert Humphrey, Edward Kennedy, Arthur Burns (the federal reserve chairman), Representative Bella Abzug, and Richard Nixon.

Senator Church said that even a letter from himself to his mother was in the CIA file. He and the committee would be holding more detailed hearings on why this and the other correspondence was scrutinised by the CIA.

The Democratic Senator did not specify when the CIA was reading all this mail, but a committee spokesman told reporters that the secret programme was authorised in 1952 and continued from 1954 until 1973.

Only one letter to Mr Nixon was interception. It was addressed from abroad and

while he was campaigning for the presidency. Mr Nixon did not know that it had been opened.

The only witness today was Mr James Angleton, a top spy for 31 years and head of the CIA's counter-intelligence operations. In three hours of questioning he confessed to a variety of activities which left the Senators visibly shocked.

At one moment he was asked why President Nixon had not been informed of the mail surveillance. Mr Angleton said he would have been if he had asked.

Public interest in the mail-tap operation, and other secret activities, including telephone bugging and burglaries, first came out during the Watergate hearings, when it was revealed that President Nixon had ordered and then five days later countermanded a substantial programme of domestic "dirty tricks," known as the Huston plan after the White House aide who devised it.

Yesterday, Senator Church had said that the intelligence agencies had ignored the revocation order, and had expanded their activities and reinstated others which had been abandoned years before.

Today, Mr Angleton was asked to justify this. He was read a statement he had made himself to the committee's staff earlier in the year saying that it was "inconceivable" that a secret agency should have to comply with all the overt orders of a President. When he asked whether he still stood by that, he first replied: "If it was accurate it should not have been said," then said it was "imprudent," and finally asked to retract it.

After last week's disclosure that CIA officials had ignored a presidential order to destroy highly lethal poisons, Senator Schweiker of Pennsylvania commented today that the committee's hearings had turned up "an awful lot of people" in the intelligence community who thought it was all right to contradict the President.

Mr Angleton also revealed

between the CIA and Mr J. Edgar Hoover's FBI. Yesterday Senator Church had talked of them as "independent fiefdoms" jealously guarding their privileges. Mr Angleton said that over a period of 25 years the heads of the two agencies had only met formally four or five times.

Although the main thrust of today's hearings was the CIA's lawlessness and freedom from presidential control, Senator Mondale (Democrat, Minnesota) turned the spotlight on Mr Nixon at one point. He referred to a memorandum written by the former President in 1970 about the peace movement. In it Mr Nixon alleged that there were "thousands of Americans, mostly under 30, who are determined to destroy this country." The Senator said that to think like this could only be paranoia, and he wanted to see Mr Nixon testify publicly—an invitation the committee extended.

Earlier, Senator Hart, who also wants Mr Nixon to be called, said the question was who gave the orders, and were these abuses shared by elected officials?

The conservative Texan, Mr John Tower, tried to cool the discussion by saying that the question of inviting Mr Nixon would be better left to secret session. But now the issue is out, and — in the light of today's revelation — it is unlikely to die down.

In a separate investigation by a House of Representatives subcommittee, FBI officials were shown today to have widely overstepped the mark in watching Americans. The Comptroller-General, Mr Elmer Staats, who is conducting an audit of the agency said it frequently investigated people whose connection with subversive groups was either slight or nonexistent.

In a sample of 676 FBI dossiers which he had reviewed, more than half the people had little or no ties with extremists. The FBI's Washington headquarters only had "limited control" over the investigations, and field officers,